

EWOSTATEWOS (Eustatheus)

Ewostatewos is known as the champion of the Jewish Sabbath in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He was born Ma'eqaba Egzi' (Trust of the Lord) to a noble family of Krestos Mo'a and Sena Heywat, a family known for gathering the elderly poor together and providing them with their needs. Their faith was strengthened when God heard their prayer of many years to have a child and gave them Ma'eqaba Egzi'.

When Ma'eqaba Egzi' reached school age, his parents took him to Abba Dane'el (Daniel), brother of Sena Heywat, where he pursued his education diligently. This Abba Dane'el founded the monastery Dabra Maryam in May Qwerqwer (Tigre). Ma'eqaba Egzi''s inclination toward the religious life began as soon as he started school. He grew up paying no attention to his bodily comfort. Ma'eqaba Egzi' was still a young boy when Abba Dane'el agreed to clothe him with the monastic garb, and renamed him Ewostatewos.

After his ordination as a priest, Ewostatewos felt the call to go out and teach: "Sow the word of God, teach and make the law of the God of truth be heard even as you were commanded before." However, he came back to his monastery regularly for retreat and seclusion, a practice that gave him occasion to study his holy books.

Ewostatewos soon became a prominent monastic leader with many followers, including Abba Absadi, his successor and a monastic leader in his own right. Ewostatewos set rules for his followers, including the punishable prohibition of speaking against others. He also advised them not to be eager to be ordained priests— advice with far-reaching consequences for the community. As to the general public, he admonished them against slavery, murder, robbery, and fornication.

Ewostatewos was among the monastic leaders who chastized Emperor 'Amda Seyon (1314-1344) for associating himself with a wife of his own

father. When 'Amda Seyon banished him, Ewostatewos attempted to overthrow him by encouraging Warasina Egzi', the ruler of Hamasen, to rebel.

A more serious controversy, one that forced the monk to leave Ethiopia for good, ensued from the questions of the [Saturday](#) Sabbath. According to the Synodicon, one of the canonical books of the Ethiopian church, both Saturday and Sunday are days of rest to be observed by the faithful. The metropolitans coming from [Alexandria](#) made it known, however, that [Saturday](#) is not observed in the Coptic church. In fact, they even taught that [Ethiopians](#) should abandon Jewish practices, including the observance of [Saturday](#) as a Sabbath. This created a great schism in the Ethiopian church. Many agreed to observe only Sunday. But a few, led by Ewostatewos, refused to violate the commandments of their Scriptures, the New and the Old Testaments and the books of canon law which command the observance of Saturday.

The feuding parties came to the king's court looking for a ruling.

There was apparently no [metropolitan](#) in the country at that time. However, since the king was not in a position to pass any judgment on ecclesiastical matters and feared the implications of schism for his kingdom, he asked the two parties to go to Egypt and settle their differences before the patriarch. Before Ewostatewos left for Egypt, he ordered his followers never to associate themselves with those who did not follow his teaching. This order created an independent community within the church and the state, which became a real problem for the political as well as religious leaders of the country. Some of his [disciples](#) accompanied their father as far as Bogos (in what is now Eritrea), where he asked Absadi to return to the monastery and take charge of its administration. Only twelve of his disciples stayed with him to continue the journey.

Predictably, Ewostatewos' journey to Egypt was not a success as far as

his cause of observing [Saturday](#) as a Christian Sabbath was concerned. According to his hagiographer, Patriarch [BENJAMIN](#) II (1327-1339) was sympathetic to his cause, but he is reported to have said that this teaching of the apostles had long been abandoned. Ewostatewos and his followers left the patriarchate and spent some time in the monasteries in SCETIS in strict asceticism. The hagiographer mentions the Monastery of Elijah as one of the monasteries they visited there.

After he left Scetis, he visited the Holy Land and Cyprus, and went to Armenia, where he spent the rest of his life. Why Ewostatewos wanted to go to Armenia is not clear. He had either heard a report that the [Saturday](#) Sabbath was observed there, or else he wanted to live in another country where [monophysitism](#) was the religion. His [disciples](#) at home made a statue of their teacher to be erected in Dabra Maryam, an unusual practice in the Ethiopian church.

His followers continued their separate life for many years to come. Most of those who went with him perished on the journey, but two of them were able to return to Ethiopia. They attempted to convert the Falasha (Ethiopian Jews) to Christianity. Observance of the [Saturday](#) Sabbath is the central point in the religion of the Falasha. When the number of the Ewostatewosites grew at an alarming rate and their order continued to differ from the tradition practiced by the established church—taking too seriously the advice of their teacher not to be eager to be ordained priests, they denounced [priesthood](#)—Emperor Dawit (1382-1413) banned the movement. Since they were many and determined, destroying them was impossible. Finally his son, Emperor Zar'a Ya'qob (1434-1468), brought an end to the schism by summoning a council to consider the issue. The Council of Dabra Metmaq (1445) declared that according to the books accepted by the Ethiopian church, [Saturday](#) was a Sabbath to be observed by all Christians.

Ewostatewos is commemorated on 18 Maskaram (Tut).



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